



Sexual Behavior Questions on the 2010 Healthy Youth Survey

Frequently Asked Questions

What sexual behavior questions are on the 2010 HYS?

The four questions are from the middle school national Youth Risk Behavioral Survey sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These include:

- Have you ever had sexual intercourse? (Yes, No)
- How old were you when you had sexual intercourse for the first time? (I have never had sexual intercourse; 11 years or younger; 12,13,14,15,16;17 or older)
- With how many people have you ever had sexual intercourse? (I have never had sexual intercourse; 1 person; 2, 3, 4, 5 people; 6 or more people)
- The last time you had sexual intercourse, did you or your partner use a condom? I have never had sexual intercourse, (Yes, No)

If students answer “No” to the first question, they will be instructed to skip the remaining questions.

What grades are asked these questions?

These questions are on one of the questionnaires for grades 8, 10 and 12. They are not on the grade 6 questionnaire.

Can schools decline to ask these questions?

Schools have two ways to decline asking the sexual behavior questions. There is a version of the questionnaire that does not include these questions. Schools can request this version when they register for HYS. Additionally, the sexual behavior questions are at the end of the survey on a perforated tear-off page that also contains other potentially sensitive questions. If schools remove the tear-off questions, they will also remove the sexual behavior questions.

Do others states ask these questions?

At least 44 states ask sexual behavior questions on their statewide youth surveys. Most states use questions from the national Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

Will sexual behavior increase if we ask about it?

Research shows that asking youth about sexual behavior does not increase this behavior. Additionally, if there were large-scale negative effects of the Healthy Youth Survey questions on health-risk behaviors, in general, we would expect to see increases over time in behaviors that we have measured repeatedly, such as violence and substance use. We do not, however, see a consistent pattern of increases. Nationally, even though most states ask youth about sexual behavior, the percent of sexually active adolescents is dropping in many states.

How does collecting sexual behavior data benefit school districts?

Having actual data about the prevalence (or lack thereof) of sexual behavior can assist a district or school in reshaping social norms. For example, asking questions about sexual behavior gives students who have NOT had sex the opportunity to be represented. According to the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 52 percent of high school students nationally have never had sexual intercourse. Unfortunately, students often operate on the inaccurate perception that most other youth have had sexual intercourse.

For districts that don't offer sexual health education, data could provide rationale for the inclusion of this content in the curriculum. Sexual behavior data could be particularly useful when talking to school boards and community members about the necessity for sexual health education.

For districts that already offer sexual health education, data could provide support for continuing the program, or for modifying the program to most effectively meet the needs of students. If, for example, data suggests that a significant proportion of students begin intercourse behaviors at the ninth Grade level, the district may decide to incorporate lessons on abstinence, contraceptives, STDs, HIV, and sexual decision making at the middle school level.

Sexual behavior data can give districts a better sense of how and where to target appropriate interventions with limited resources. Research shows that utilizing interventions that target youth at highest risk benefits not only those youth, but all youth who participate.

Sexual behavior data can be used to generate support for student support services and programs, not just sexual health education. Research has established connections between premature sexual behavior and a variety of other health risk behaviors. Research has also established strong links between students' sense of connectedness to school, adults, and delayed or protected sexual behavior.

For more information:

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